May 24, 2012

Mr. Dick Costolo
Chief Executive Officer
Twitter, Inc.
795 Folsom St., Suite 600
San Francisco, CA 94107

Dear Mr. Costolo,

On May 17, 2012, Twitter announced in a blog post that the company will begin new experiments of highlighting user accounts in a more tailored approach ("New tailored suggestions for you to follow on Twitter").[1] The company indicates that the first phase of the experiment will only include a select number of users and offer an experience that "lets novice users go from zero to pro faster and more easily than ever before." The company also announced its support for "Do-Not-Track."

Twitter is by far a company with a success story. The company, founded in 2006, was listed as number five on Business Insider's Digital 100 Top Ten list, a list that ranks the world's leading private online companies.[2] Also, the company is estimated to be worth more than $5 billion and climbing towards the $10 billion mark on secondary markets.[3] In addition, Twitter is projected to have around 460,000 sign-ups per day with over 300 million registered accounts.[4] With an online social networking company growing at this type of rapid pace, we believe it is pivotal to ensure that consumer protection is at the forefront of every newly-developed operation.

As members of the Congressional Bi-Partisan Privacy Caucus and House Committee on Energy and Commerce, we applaud Twitter's move to protect consumer privacy and believe their voluntary approach to "Do-Not-Track" is one that other companies should follow. However, we would like to inquire about the data collection and practices regarding Twitter's experiments to provide tailored suggestions to its users. Accordingly, we request responses to the questions that follow.

---

[1] *New tailored suggestions for you to follow on Twitter*. (2012, May 17). Retrieved on May 18, 2012, from http://blog.twitter.com/2012/05/new-tailored-suggestions-for-you-to.html
[2] *The 100 Most Valuable Startups In The World, Revamped And Revised!* (2011, October 7). Retrieved on May 22, 2012, from http://www.businessinsider.com/2011-digital-100#4-twitter-4
[3] *The Real History of Twitter*. (2011, April 13). Retrieved on May 22, 2012, from http://articles.businessinsider.com/2011-04-13/tech/29957143_1_jack-dorsey-twitter-podcasting
[4] *How Many People Actually Use Twitter? Good Question*. (2011, August 29). Retrieved on May 22, 2012, from http://techland.time.com/2011/08/29/how-many-people-actually-use-twitter-good-question/

1. Please describe all personally identifiable information that Twitter collects from its consumers.

2. How is user information collected (i.e. initial sign-up process, usage of mobile phone application, etc.)?

3. Please explain how Twitter stores this information (i.e., in a form that is encrypted or otherwise indecipherable to unauthorized persons)? How long is it stored? How does your company dispose of the information, if at all?

4. For new users, it is our understanding that Twitter is going to show a list of accounts recommended by the company, alongside a timeline with Tweets from those accounts. Please describe the algorithms that will be used to recommend particular user accounts. How will Twitter be able to determine what user accounts are "relevant" to a new user without any history of user activity on the social networking site?

5. Twitter will begin to offer tailored suggestions on "who to follow" to current users to allow for easy access to potentially interesting and relevant accounts. How will Twitter implement this function? Will it differ from how new users are targeted?

6. On Twitter's blog, the user is informed that the new tailored suggestions "are based on accounts followed by other Twitter users and visits to websites in the Twitter ecosystem." Please provide more details regarding the Twitter ecosystem. What does the ecosystem consist of? Who are the participants?

7. How did Twitter decide what consumers would participate in Phase 1 of the experiment? How will Twitter decide who will participate in the future phases? How many phases is Twitter projecting to implement? What other experiments is Twitter planning to use?

8. Twitter explains that it will target various user accounts to current users by using the data collected from Twitter widgets across the web. Please describe in detail what information is collected from widgets. Is this information collected automatically when a user simply visits a website with a widget icon?

9. Twitter announced its support of "Do-Not-Track" and explains that it would honor the request of a user when this function is active.[5] However, on a mobile device, how does Twitter provide a consumer with the choice to opt-out of being tracked online to provide tailored suggestions to the user? Would Twitter honor the "Do-Not-Track" request of a user across all platforms?

10. If a user does not have the "Do-Not-Track" function active, but decides that they would rather not participate in the new tailored approached offered by Twitter, how does Twitter honor this request? If it does not honor such a request, why not?
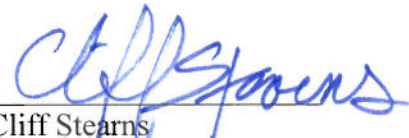
---

[5] *Twitter Supports "Do Not Track."* (n.d.). Retrieved on May 18, 2012, from https://support.twitter.com/articles/20169453#

11. Please describe Twitter's policies for the deletion of user data after a request has been made. Upon such a request, how long does it take the company to fully delete the information from all of its systems?

12. Under what circumstances does Twitter retain data after users request its deletion? How might consumers benefit from such retention?

Please provide responses to these questions within 16 business days or no later than June 15, 2012. If you have any questions, please contact Emmanual Guillory in Rep. Barton's office at 202-225-2002 or Brooke Ericson in Rep. Stearns' office at 202-225-5744.

Sincerely,

Joe Barton
Co-Chairman
Bi-Partisan Privacy Caucus

Cliff Stearns
Chairman
Oversight & Investigations Subcommittee